

February 11, 2016

APPtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Re: Reduction of funds for Coventry STEPS LECC

My name is Mary Sposito and I live at 815 Wrights Mill Road in Coventry, CT. I am a parent and also work as the Director of the Coventry Early Childhood Center, Inc. (CECC) which is the only NAEYC accredited preschool program in Coventry for 3 and 4 year old children. I have served as a member of the STEPS Executive Council and the Nurtured Committees since 2008.

I am writing to dispute the reduction of funds Coventry receives from the Office of Early Childhood for the continuation of this extremely important work.

Coventry STEPS has strived to achieve the results statement, ***ALL Coventry Children Birth- Age 8 are Nurtured, Healthy, Engaged & Successful Learners.*** The LECC is dedicated to turn-the-curve on identified indicators and has been focused on the strategies for child abuse and neglect, health and education. Many key stakeholders in the community, including parents, educators, and local and state leaders have formed solutions to improve conditions for our children birth through age 8 and their families.

From an early childhood provider prospective, CECC works closely with the STEPS collaborative to continue to meet and improve the Community Relationship standards which supports accreditation.

I would like to express the following regarding budget decisions:

- I oppose the \$12 million overall cut to the Office of Early Childhood (\$4 million in direct cuts, \$8 million in underfunding of Birth to Three).
- I oppose the block grant approach to the budget which is proposed by the Governor. Lumping all programs into one Office of Early Childhood budget erases transparency. Without guidelines for the agencies to set and publicize their budget decisions, programs would be left in the dark as to how to proceed to serve children.
- I recommend the halting of new initiatives while this budget crisis continues so that we can focus on existing services.
- I urge support for those programs that are directly serving children, as well as those that help fulfill the mandates and regulations required of these programs (things like NAEYC accreditation, workforce trainings, reporting): Care4Kids, Child Development Centers, Children's Trust Fund, Community Plans for Early Childhood, Early Literacy, Even Start, Head Start, School Readiness.

Future strategies of the Nurturing Committee, CECC and the Coventry Public Schools is to focus on the development of a Family Resource Center. This will help all families in Coventry, especially those families who do not have a lot of social supports. STEPS is currently working very closely with the Coventry Public Schools on this important initiative and the plan is to develop an FRC to be opened for the 2016-2017 school year.

Should we lose funding support, we would no longer have the ability to maintain the collaborative which is instrumental in:

- Engaging parents and providers in the community
- Serving as the backbone organization for local early childhood initiatives and bringing key stake holders together
- Leveraging other resources and grants
- Sharing information with parents and the community around early childhood resources, services and relevant initiatives.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Mary Sposito
Coventry Resident
CECC School Operations Director